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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - IRAQ: FORMATION OF NEW
GOVERNMENT SECRETARY RICE TO ASIA
PARIS - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. IRAQ: FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT
2. SECRETARY RICE TO ASIA

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

FRONT-PAGES AND SEVERAL EDITORIALS ARE DEVOTED TO THE EUROPEAN UNION'S BOLKESTEIN DIRECTIVE, A MEASURE AFFECTING THE SERVICE SECTOR AND WHICH, ACCORDING TO SOME, IS BEING USED AND ABUSED BY THE PROPONENTS OF THE "NO" ON THE EU CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM. PRESIDENT CHIRAC IS QUOTED AS CALLING THE DIRECTIVE "UNACCEPTABLE." YVES THREARD IN LE FIGARO CRITICIZES THE "OPPORTUNISM" AND "DEVIOSNESS" OF THE BOLKENSTEIN DETRACTORS. IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION, JEAN-MICHEL THENARD ASKS: "IS IT SO HARD TO FIND SOMETHING TO CRITICIZE IN THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION THAT ITS ADVERSARIES ARE GOING ELSEWHERE TO FIND AMMUNITION TO SCARE THE VOTERS?"

IRAQ AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TODAY'S HISTORIC PARLIAMENTARY SESSION IN BAGHDAD ARE NOTED. FOR ADRIEN JAULMES IN LE FIGARO, "THE SHIITES AND THE KURDS ARE TAKING THEIR REVENGE." IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX, AGNES ROTIVEL GIVES A FACTUAL REPORT OF THE SHIITES AND THE KURDS' "LONG ROAD TO POWER." ROTIVEL NOTES THE SYMBOLISM OF THE DATE: "IT IS THE ANNIVERSARY DATE OF THE 1988 GASSING OF THE KURDS IN THE VILLAGE OF HALABJA."

IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO, POLITICAL EXPERT GERARD CHALIAND SPEAKS OF "2005 AS A DECISIVE YEAR FOR IRAQ." CHALIAND GIVES CREDIT TO THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION FOR CREATING A CERTAIN "DYNAMIC" IN THE REGION, BUT CONCLUDES THAT "THE EFFECTS OF THE BUSH POLICY ARE MORE OBVIOUS IN RUSSIA'S IMMEDIATE PERIPHERY, THAN IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST." IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE, BRITISH FM JACK STRAW PENS AN OP-ED ON BRINGING DEMOCRACY TO THE MIDDLE EAST BUT WARNS AGAINST "IMPOSING A MODEL." (SEE PART C)

SECRETARY RICE'S TRIP TO ASIA IS REPORTED IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER

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LE FIGARO. FOR WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT PHILIPPE GELIE "THIS TRIP IS THE ASIAN EQUIVALENT OF HER TRIP TO EUROPE, WITH A SIMILAR FOUNDING SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED IN JAPAN." (SEE PART C)

PRIME MINISTER RAFFARIN'S VISIT TO ISRAEL IS ANALYZED IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION AS "GIVING A NEW DIRECTION TO FRANCE'S POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THIS IS THE SOFT MUSIC WE HAVE BEEN HEARING FROM THE QUAI D'ORSAY. FM BARNIER, WHO HAS THE REPUTATION OF BEING MORE OF AN ATLANTICIST THAN HIS PREDECESSOR, DE VILLEPIN, HAS MADE THIS ONE OF HIS GOALS. THE FRENCH PRESIDENT HAS OPERATED A RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE U.S. AT SYRIA'S EXPENSE. THE INVITATION TO ATTEND THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW HOLOCAUST MUSEUM IN ISRAEL HAS GIVEN FRANCE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ILLUSTRATE THIS NEW DIRECTION, BY SENDING NOT ITS FOREIGN MINISTER, AS DID GREAT BRITAIN, GERMANY OR SPAIN, BUT ITS PRIME MINISTER."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

IRAQ: FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT

"2005, A DECISIVE YEAR FOR IRAQ"

GERARD CHALIAND IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/16): "NEVER AGAIN WILL THE SUNNIS GOVERN IRAQ AS A HEGEMONY. WE MUST GIVE CREDIT TO WASHINGTON FOR THIS, NO MATTER HOW WE FEEL ABOUT THE WAR AND THE WAY IT WAS CONDUCTED. TODAY, IRAQ IS TRIPARTITE. BUT IRAQ CANNOT BE GOVERNED WITHOUT THE SUNNIS. MILITARILY SPEAKING, THE WAR IN IRAQ CANNOT BE WON BY THE AMERICANS. THIS FALLS IN THE HANDS OF THE IRAQI ARMY. BUT WILL THIS ARMY, WITH THE ADVANTAGE OF NOT BEING A FOREIGN ARMY, SUCCEED? TODAY'S SUNNI INSURRECTION EXISTS PRIMARILY THANKS TO SYRIA'S HELP. 2005 IS A DECISIVE YEAR FOR IRAQ: IT WILL DETERMINE IRAQ'S EQUILIBRIUM, OR ITS INSTABILITY. TO AVOID A CIVIL WAR IN IRAQ, SUNNI REPRESENTATION MUST BE SUPPORTED. MUCH WILL ALSO DEPEND ON IRAQ'S THREE NEIGHBORS: IRAN, SYRIA AND TURKEY. WASHINGTON IS CONVINCED THAT ITS STRATEGY OF EXPANDING THE REALM OF

REGIONAL DYNAMICS BRINGS ABOUT RESULTS. IT IS INDISPUTABLE THAT SUCH A STRATEGY HAS RESULTED IN POSITIVE EFFECTS IN UKRAINE AND GEORGIA. BUT IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST, THE U.S. IMAGE IS NOT AS POSITIVE AS IT IS IN THE FORMER COMMUNIST WORLD. THE POLICY OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION (IN THE MIDDLE EAST) MUST BE CREDITED WITH HAVING PROVOKED A CERTAIN DYNAMIC, BUT THINGS ARE STILL HAPPENING. THE RESULTS ARE MORE OBVIOUS IN THE RUSSIAN PERIPHERY THAN IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST WHERE NOTHING DECISIVE HAS HAPPENED YET, EXCEPT FOR THE TOPPLING OF IRAQ'S BAATH REGIME."

"WE MUST NOT IMPOSE A DEMOCRATIC MODEL"
BRITISH FM JACK STRAW IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (03/16):
"DEMOCRACY MUST BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE MIDDLE EAST'S BEST INTEREST, BUT ALSO EUROPE'S. IT IS AN IMPERIOUS NECESSITY TO SUPPORT THE REGION'S MODERNIZATION. BUT WE MUST BE HUMBLE. DEMOCRACY TAKES TIME. LET US NOT TRY TO IMPOSE A MODEL AND LET US LISTEN TO THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR PEOPLE. LET US ABANDON THE ARROGANT AND CONDESCENDING NOTION THAT ISLAM IS OPPOSED TO CHANGE. THIS IS NOT THE CASE IN INDONESIA OR TURKEY. EUROPE HAS A TRUE OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THE U.S. IN SUPPORTING THE EXPANSION OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY. LET US DO THIS NOT AS TACITURN PARTNERS, BUT BY BRINGING TO THE TABLE WHAT EUROPE KNOWS OF THE MIDDLE EAST."

SECRETARY RICE TO ASIA

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"AFTER EUROPE, RICE TO CHARM ASIA"
PHILIPPE GELIE IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/16): "THE TRIP RICE BEGAN YESTERDAY IS MEANT AS THE EQUIVALENT OF HER TRIP TO EUROPE, WITH A SIMILAR POLICY SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED IN JAPAN. SECRETARY RICE MAY ANNOUNCE THE SALE OF F-16 AIRCRAFT TO BOTH

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INDIA AND PAKISTAN, THUS IMPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGING THEIR STATUS AS NUCLEAR POWERS. MORE GENERALLY, THE TRIP GIVES WASHINGTON AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEFINE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA. WHOSE RECENT LAW ON THE USE OF FORCE AGAINST TAIWAN RE-ENFORCES AMERICA'S CONCERNS." LEACH